

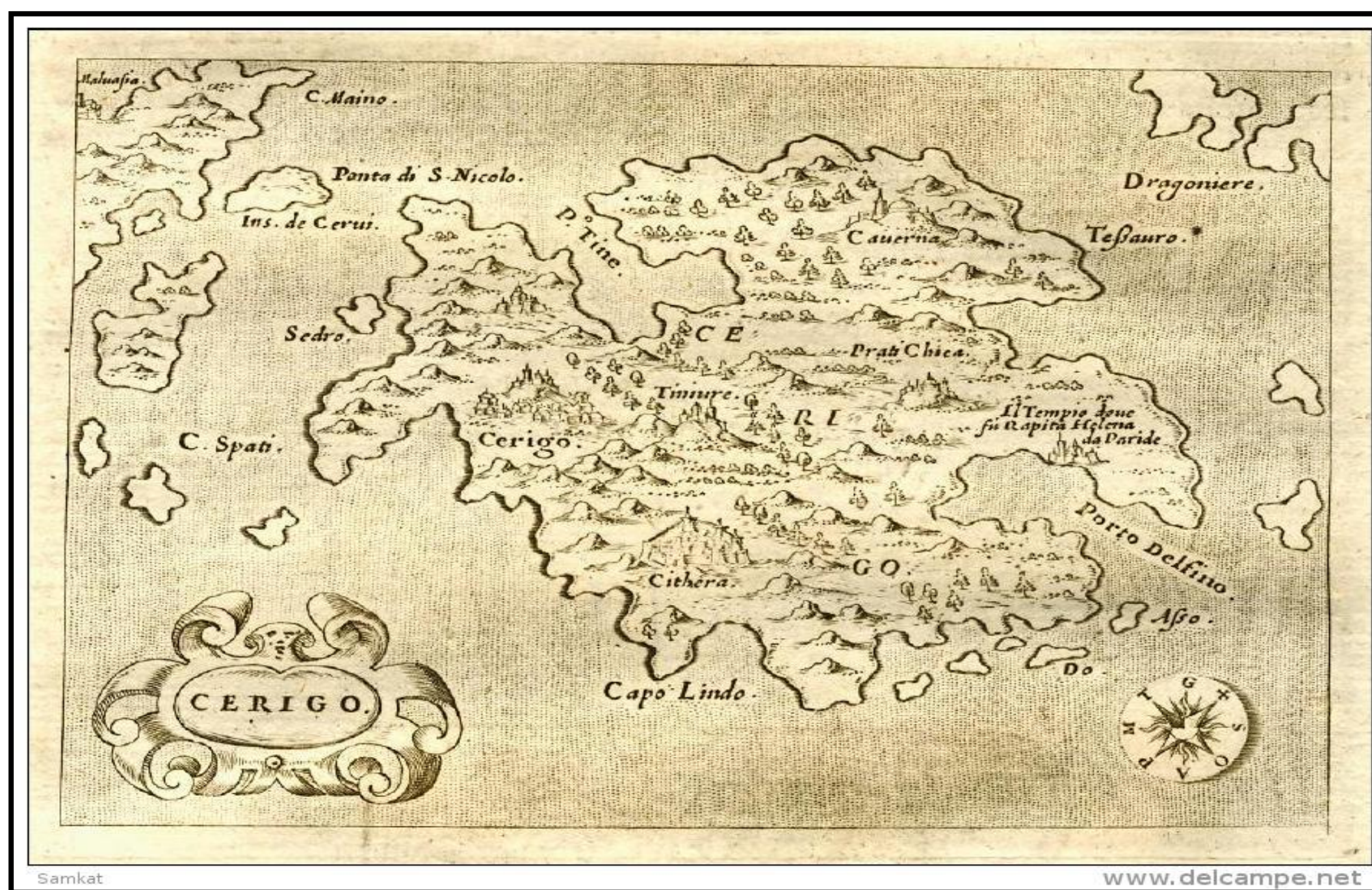
The Churches of Kythera:

How the People of Northern Kythera Used Churches as a System of Defense during the Late-Byzantine and Venetian Periods



Introduction and Methodology:

The Greek island of Kythera is located south of the Peloponnese and lies at the center of major trade routes. Kythera's strategic location between Venice and Crete, and the eastern and western Mediterranean, made the island desirable to various pirate groups and neighboring empires. During the Byzantine and Venetian periods the Venetian nobles were mostly uninterested in fortifying the northern half of the island, thus a suitable defensive system was never procured. Instead, I argue that a series of churches were used as *viglatores*, or watchtowers, in order to guard the coastline and entrances into the island. In addition, the Kytheran peasants placed their hopes in supernatural defenders, who were invoked through church dedications and frescoes.

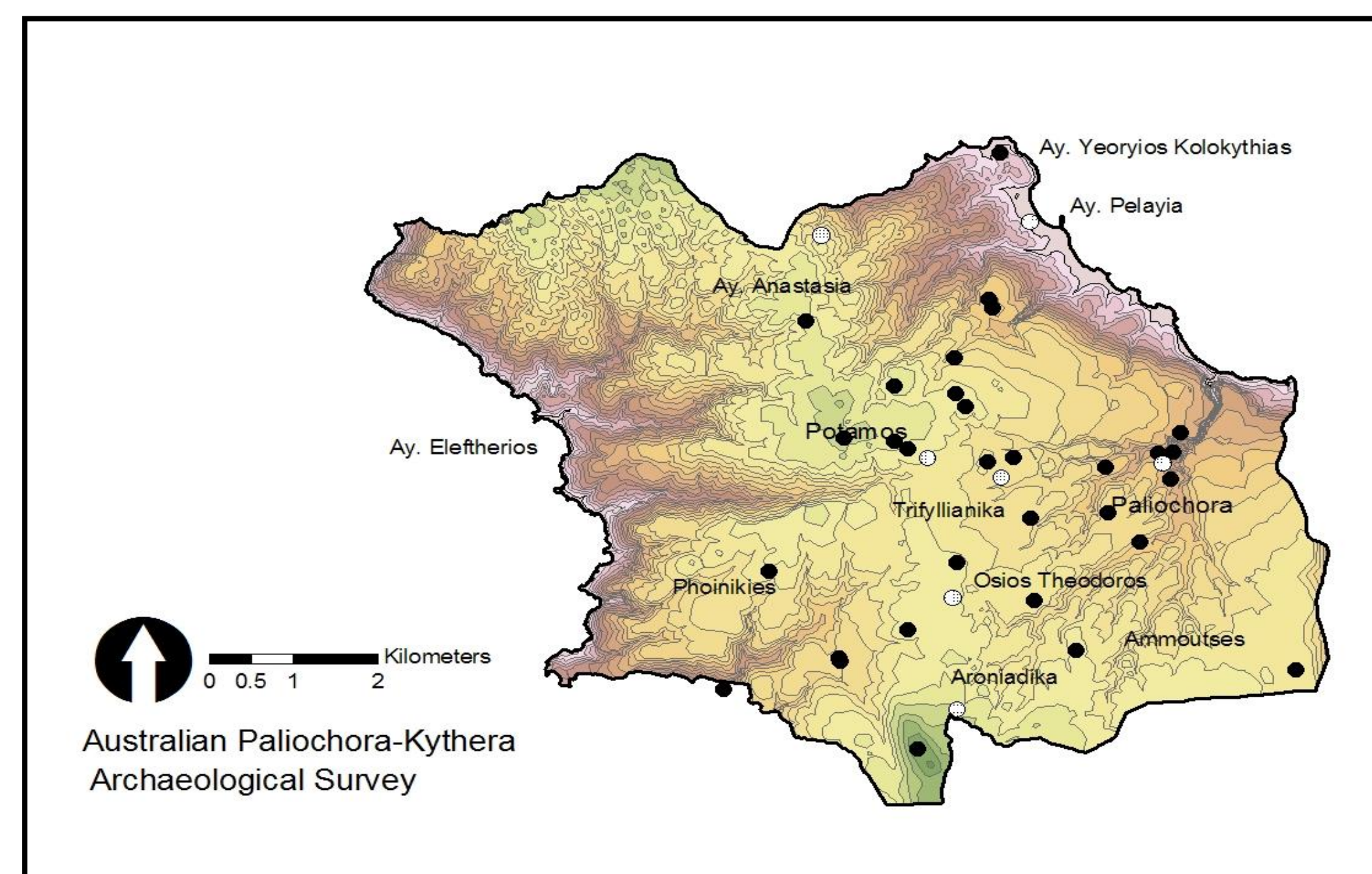


The first half of this study examined an APKAS database of Kythera's Byzantine churches, the architectural features of these churches, as well as spatial analysis gathered by GIS (Geographic Information Systems). By analyzing the features and locations of these churches I was able to argue several specific examples that were used as *viglatores*.

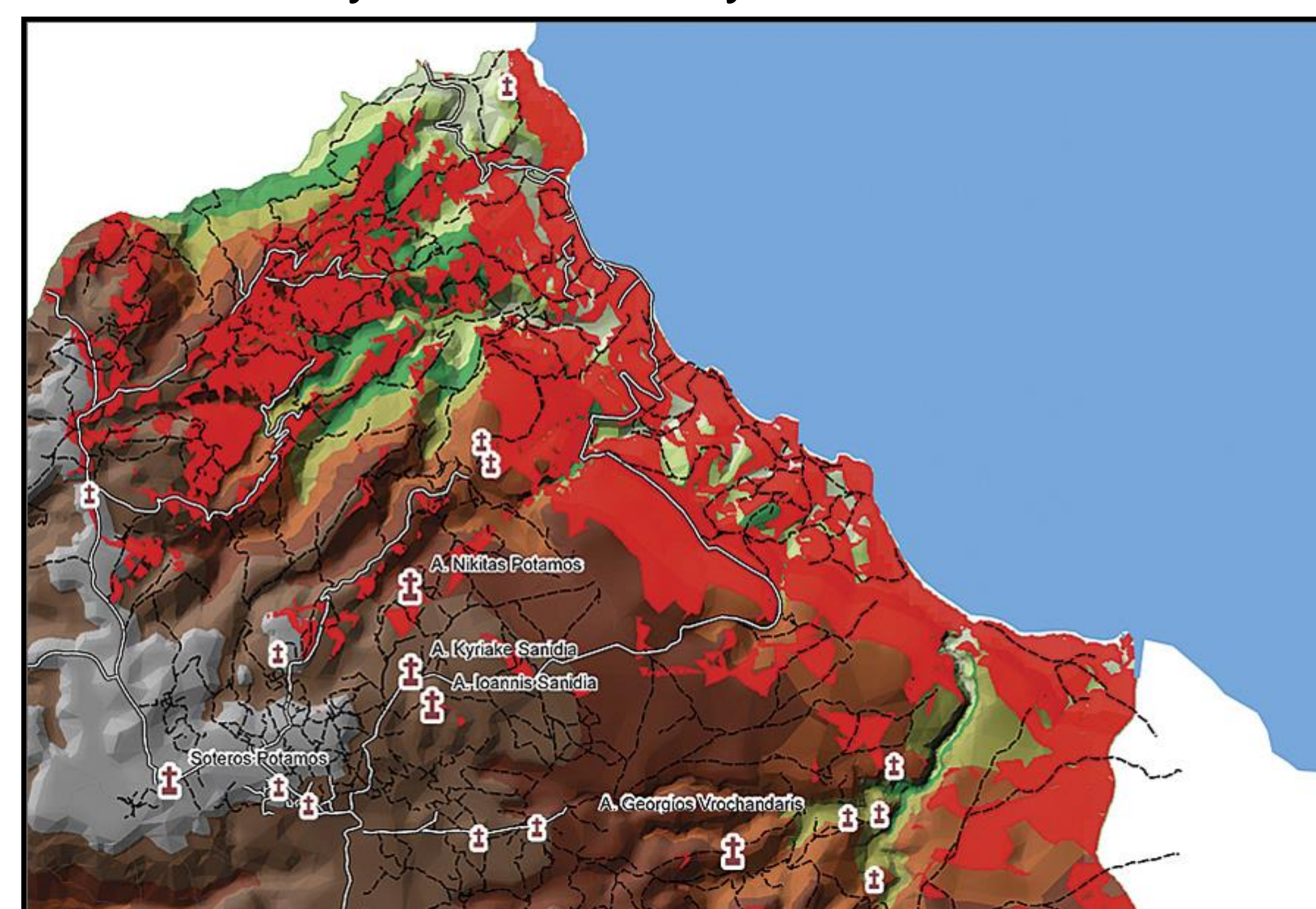
The second half analyzed the wall paintings in these churches, ascertaining which saints were most commonly portrayed and identifying the themes and characteristics that made these saints so important to the Kytheran people. Also vital was the abundant folklore circulating through the island.

Results:

At least two churches on Kythera were built attached to, or in close proximity to, a tower-like structure. These examples were vital in arguing that other churches served this purpose. Churches placed high above towns or ports make the most likely *viglatores*. This evidence also allows me to argue that other churches, with features that are not yet identified, or without any additional structure were also used for this reason. While this information does better explain how Kythera's defenses functioned, it also assists in better understanding Kythera's settlement patterns.



Additionally, other potential functions of these churches were identified in this study. It appears that these churches were used as sites of refuge during times of attack. This is evident in the hidden and often isolated locations of these buildings. This is especially beneficial in such a vulnerable environment, which northern Kythera certainly was.



(cont.) Results:

There were several groups of saints prominently represented on Kythera. The first of these consisted of powerful military saints. Saints such as Demetrios, Georgios, and Theodoros, are often depicted through dedications and frescoes. Also important were the "Kytheran" saints, Saint Elesa and Saint Theodoros. Both of these saints were martyred on the island, and performed many miracles before and after their deaths. Finally, healer saints such as Saint Blaise were popular on the island. These findings are important for several reasons: First, it aids in understanding how the island prepared their defenses. It also better explains how people understood saints and the divine protection they provided. Finally, we can compare the saints present on Kythera to the saints popular in other areas to track the periods when and places where these figures were revered,



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